

We want to hear from you!

■ Attend one of our town hall meetings...

<b>Auburn</b> Saturday, Feb. 21 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. City Council Chamber 25 West Main	<b>Enumclaw</b> Saturday, Feb. 21 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Enumclaw Com. Center 1350 Cole St.	<b>Bonney Lake</b> Saturday, Feb. 21 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Bonney Lake Sr. Center 19306 Bonney Lake Blvd.
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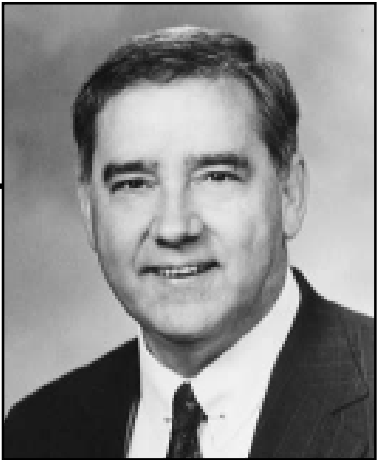
■ Or join us in Olympia for the day!

**31<sup>st</sup> District Day at the state Capitol**  
**Wednesday, Feb. 25.**  
**10 a.m. in the Capitol rotunda**

Join us in Olympia for the day to tour the state Capitol campus, have lunch with us and see firsthand the state Legislature in session. Please contact our offices to RSVP by Feb. 23:

<b>Rep. Eric Robertson</b> <b>(360) 786-7846</b>	<b>Rep. Les Thomas</b> <b>(360) 786-7866</b>
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**Representative Les Thomas**  
**31<sup>st</sup> District**



**1998 Legislative Session**  
**Progress Report:**  
**Improving Our Schools**

Dear neighbors,

This past fall, for the first time, results of new academic testing gave us a chance to see the scope of the challenge we face in reforming our public schools.

This newsletter explains the steps we have taken, as well as those we are pursuing during the 1998 legislative session, in our effort to significantly improve the education of our children.

Education is my top priority. It's critical that we do a better job of preparing our children with the basic skills and knowledge they'll need to be successful in life. Please take a moment to read this newsletter. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me in Olympia at (360) 786-7866.

I also want to encourage you to attend one of the town hall meetings Rep. Eric Robertson and I have scheduled throughout the district on Saturday, Feb. 21, as well as the annual 31<sup>st</sup> District Day at the state Capitol in Olympia on Wednesday, Feb. 25. Additional information about these events is on back.

I look forward to seeing you soon.  
Sincerely,

  
Rep. Les Thomas

**Rep. Les Thomas**  
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**Rep. Les Thomas**

**Washington State Legislature**

**1998 Session Progress Report:**  
**Improving Our Schools**

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# 1998 Session Progress Report: Improving Our Schools

## ■ Test results signal need for improvement

Last spring, fourth-grade students in elementary schools across the state took a set of new tests. These tests were designed to measure their knowledge of the state's new essential academic learning requirements, established by the Legislature's reform efforts in 1993.

The tests, which reflected these new, tougher academic standards, were difficult. They measured skills fourth-graders have not previously been asked to demonstrate, such as writing stories and descriptive essays, using math skills to solve complex problems and explaining answers. But, while challenging, the committee of elementary teachers, parents, curriculum specialists and business leaders who developed the tests, all agreed they were doable.

The higher expectations are focused in four basic areas:

1. Writing
2. Math and science
3. Effective communication
4. Problem analyzation and solution

The results, while disappointing, were not surprising because our children were being asked to perform at a higher level than ever before. For example, only 22 percent met or exceeded the standard in mathematics and less than half met or exceeded the standard in both reading and writing.

However, this first set of results does give us a benchmark — not just a measure of the shortcomings of our public school curriculum and programs, but, more importantly, a starting point for needed change.

## ■ Setting higher standards with an emphasis on reading

With the adoption of higher academic standards and new tests, the Legislature is providing clear expectations of all teachers and students. These clear academic standards for the core subjects are helping ensure local teachers, parents and students do a better job of setting priorities.

However, in addition to the new standards, the Legislature has also placed a special emphasis on the importance of reading. If the new test scores tell us anything, they indicate we are failing to adequately teach our children to read — by far the most important skill they will need in life.

Last session, we passed a bill to establish a statewide project to identify successful research-based reading programs that all districts can access. The new law also requires the testing of all second-grade students in accuracy and fluency so that children with reading problems can be identified quickly and early intervention can take place.

### ***The Results:***

Here's the percentage of fourth-graders across the state who met or exceeded the standard in the four areas of basic skill:

**Mathematics ..... 22 percent**

**Reading..... 48 percent**

**Writing ..... 42 percent**

**Listening ..... 62 percent**

# Representative Les Thomas • 31st District

## ■ Adequate funding already a reality

Let's dispel a few myths about education funding. Overall funding was *increased* in the 1997-99 biennium by 7.5 percent. Student enrollment is expected to increase by 3.9 percent in the coming biennium, and the current rate of inflation is slightly less than 3 percent.

In other words, education funding was not only increased by the Legislature last year — it was increased at a level that *exceeds* projected enrollment growth and the rate of inflation.

The preceding point is very important. It tells us that the spending limits established by Initiative 601 do *not* prevent the state from properly funding

education. We are still able to provide teachers, administrators and students in our schools with the resources they need.

Given that, it's also important to remember that more money is not always followed by better results. If we want improvements in our education system, we also must increase academic standards and accountability.

The Legislature also has provided more money to build new schools. In fact, with an appropriation of \$277.6 million, the 1997-99 capital budget fully funded all eligible public school construction projects for the next two years, eliminating the current backlog of construction requests from local school districts.

***A group of students from Westwood Elementary visit Rep. Thomas and Rep. Eric Robertson at the state Capitol in Olympia***



## ■ Ensuring a safe, disciplined learning environment

The simple fact is, children can't learn when they aren't safe, or when a classroom is disrupted. As such, the Legislature has approved several initiatives that help ensure students are not distracted from the learning process.

Many are safety measures that allow teachers to control their classrooms when disciplinary measures become necessary. For example, in cases of gang activity, teachers and administrators now have greater authority to remove students who refuse to allow other children to participate in the classroom.

Another new law gives administrators access to records of juveniles with a history of criminal behavior. Formerly, such records were sealed. Now administrators have the ability to evaluate students more carefully, and act on admissions decisions accordingly.

## ■ The '98 legislative session: Increasing accountability, flexibility to achieve results

This session, the Legislature is pursuing measures to provide strict accountability for increasing student academic achievement. These measures include strengthening the high school diploma so it becomes a meaningful document of achievement, and proposals designed to increase parental involvement in schools.

Success, however, will ultimately come through greater local control of our schools. So this session, we are continuing to work to free local schools from the unnecessary and excessive government regulations and red tape that thwart efforts to improve education. We believe providing schools with greater flexibility to be innovative and creative is a key element to improving student learning. These changes would empower local administrators, teachers and parents to develop strategies that most effectively teach students and raise academic performance in their local communities.